

This section presents three stand-alone language learning activities related to the theme of spring. Each activity is designed for students at the proficiency level indicated.

Lessons from *Silent Spring*

Level: Upper Intermediate/Advanced

Goals: To familiarize students with a pioneer of the environmental movement in the United States; to have students discuss local or worldwide environmental problems; to have students consider what the world might look like in the future if no change is made.

Time required: 60 minutes

Optional Materials: copies of the passage, poster paper, markers or crayons

Procedures:

Introduction

Write *Silent Spring* on the board. Let students know that this is the title of a book but do not give any more information. Have students, in pairs or groups, brainstorm ideas on what they think the book is about. Have each pair or group share at least one idea with the class.

Listening

Let students know they will be listening to a brief passage from an environmental book written by an American author, along with two quotes from the book. Before you read, write the “*Silent Spring* Questions” on the board, along with any other questions you’d like to add. Read the passage to your students three times, giving time after each reading for students to write or discuss their answers. First, have students write their answers individually. After the second reading, have students discuss their answers in pairs. After the third reading, go over the answers as a class. If you feel your students need to hear the passage more times, you can read it again.

(If you prefer to use the passage as the basis of a reading activity, you can write it on the board or

large piece of paper or make copies of the passage. Have students read and answer the questions.)

Silent Spring Questions

COMPREHENSION:

- What is the name of the author of *Silent Spring*?
- When and where was the author born?
- What was different about *Silent Spring* compared to the author’s other books?
- What was the author hoping to change?
- How was the first chapter different from the rest of the book?

DISCUSSION:

- Compare the two quotes from the first chapter of *Silent Spring*. How did each quote make you feel?
- Think of someone else who attempted to make a change in society. What happened?

Here is the passage:

Silent Spring, a famous book by environmentalist Rachel Carson, is known for helping begin the environmental movement in the United States. Carson, born in a small town in Pennsylvania in the early 1900s, was always known to be a nature lover. She wrote books about her love of nature and animals. But *Silent Spring*, which was published in 1962, took a different tone than her other books; it expressed Carson’s concern about the use of a dangerous chemical, called DDT, that was damaging wildlife populations. *Silent Spring* criticized those who were using or allowing the use of this chemical. Although many disagreed with Carson, stating that the use of chemicals helped reduce famine

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and disease, her book caught the attention of enough people that eventually DDT was banned. Most of the book is based on Carson's scientific investigations; however, the first chapter reads like a sad fairy tale, describing a town in the United States that could no longer enjoy seeing wildlife or listening to birds singing because all of them had died. That chapter painted a picture that allowed people to visualize a world they didn't want to see.

Here are two quotes from *Silent Spring*:

"THERE WAS ONCE a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checker-board of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields."

* * *

"Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death."

(Note: The passages quoted here are from the 40th Anniversary Edition of *Silent Spring*, published in 2002 by Mariner Books; the entire book is available on Google Books. The first quote is from p. 1; the second is from p. 2.)

Brainstorming

As a class, make a list of environmental problems you see in your area. Have students share ideas and create a list on the board.

Examples might include the following:

- Overuse of plastic bags
- Litter
- Water pollution
- Traffic/air pollution

Two-minute Discussions

Let students know they will be having short discussions in pairs and that after two minutes,

they will change partners. (It would be a good idea to create an easy method of switching partners. For example, if your classroom is set up in rows, have students on the right move one seat forward, with the first person moving to the back.)

Write the following prompts (and any others you'd like to add) on the board:

- What is the problem?
- Why is it happening?
- How does it affect people's lives?
- Do you think it is an important problem? (Do you think something needs to change? Or is it important to continue with no change for other reasons?)
- What changes could people make to help fix the problem?

Once students are in pairs, pick one of the topics on the board and let students discuss it. When the two minutes are up, have students switch pairs quickly, select another topic, and start discussing again. (You can decide how many two-minute discussions to allow students to have based on the length of your class, the number of topics your students have thought of, etc.)

Creating a Story

Put students into groups. Have each group choose one of the topics listed on the board or come up with another topic. Tell groups that they will write a story similar to the first chapter of *Silent Spring*. Reread the two quotes from *Silent Spring* to the class. Tell students that the idea is to create a story that describes what your area or the world could look like in the future if no change is made. Encourage students to use descriptive vocabulary, to show contrast between the present and the future, and to include specific places and specific details.

Extensions

1. Have students share their stories:
 - Have each group read its story to the class.
 - Post the stories around the room and have students circulate and read them.
 - Lead a class discussion after students have listened to or read the stories. Use the following example prompts or others of your choice:

- Which of these scenarios is most likely to happen? Least likely?
- Which situation worries you the most?
- What actions can you take to help prevent these scenarios?
- Invite other students, parents, other teachers, etc., to listen to or read the stories.
- Create a book of all the stories.
- Have a contest letting students vote for the most effective story. Announce the winners to the class.

2. Have students create a “poster for change.” Tell students to think about the same issue or problem they wrote about in their stories, and have stu-

dents create a poster that informs the community about how to help fix this problem.

Examples include the following:

- Reduce the use of plastic: Take reusable bags with you when shopping. Don’t accept a plastic bag every time you buy something. Avoid using plastic bottles.
- Put trash in its proper place: Use trash cans and don’t throw trash in the water.
- Recycle!

You and your students might be able to think of other examples that are appropriate for your school or community.

Spring Cleaning

Level: Upper Beginner/Intermediate

Goals: To introduce students to household chore vocabulary and adverbs of frequency; to give students experience in taking part in a survey and sharing results

Time required: 40–60 minutes

Optional Materials: copies of chore chart

Background: Many people in the United States clean their entire house at the beginning of spring. (Sometimes people use the term *spring cleaning* to refer to any large cleaning or organizing project.) Many household chores listed in this activity can be part of the spring cleaning process.

Procedures:

1. Use the following list as the vocabulary for this activity:

Household Chores

wash the dishes
hang the laundry
dust the furniture
take out the trash
make the bed
water the plants
iron the clothes
sweep the floor

Introduce or review the vocabulary with students. Start by eliciting a list of chores that stu-

dents do around the house. Check comprehension of the vocabulary you plan to work with (use the list of chores provided or other terms you would like to include) by showing or drawing pictures of the nouns and using gestures to convey the meanings of the verbs. You can ask student volunteers to do this as well.

2. Write the list of verbs in a column on the board. Write the list of nouns in another column—out of order, as in this example:

make	the furniture
wash	the bed
dust	the dishes
etc.	

Make sure the two columns are not too close to each other, so that students do not mistakenly read across and come up with incorrect terms. You should make it clear that the items in the columns are not in order and tell students that their task is to match the items correctly.

3. Have students work in pairs to match the verbs and nouns to create common household chores.

4. Go over the answers as a class. Have student volunteers come to the board and draw a line from the verb to the matching noun. Discuss any verb that might make sense with more than one noun (e.g., *wash* the clothes). Once the correct answers

are on the board, have students compare their answers and correct any mistakes.

make ~~the furniture~~
wash ~~the bed~~
dust ~~the dishes~~
etc.

5. To check comprehension, ask a student to come to the front of the room. Have the student select one chore (without telling anyone what it is) and have him or her act it out. Have the rest of the class guess what chore it is. Continue until you have gone through all the chores or until every student has had a chance to act out one of the phrases. (If your students are familiar with the present progressive, they can make their guesses in complete sentences—for example, “She is sweeping the floor.”)

6. For reinforcement, have students rewrite the correct phrases in their notebooks.

7. Now you can add a grammar element to the activity. Introduce or review the following adverbs of frequency:

Adverbs of Frequency

always
often
sometimes
hardly ever
never

8. Tell students that the adverbs of frequency correspond approximately to the following percentages:

always 100%
often 75%
sometimes 50%
hardly ever 25%
never 0%

9. Write a list of percentages in a column on the board from largest to smallest. (Remind the class that these percentages are approximate, not exact.) Write the adverbs of frequency in another column—out of order, as in this example:

100% sometimes
75% often
50% always
etc.

10. Have students work in pairs to match the percentage to the adverb of frequency.

11. Go over answers as a class. Have student volunteers come to the board and draw a line from the percentage to the matching adverb of frequency. Once you have the correct answers on the board, have students compare the answers they came up with and correct any mistakes.

100% ~~sometimes~~
75% ~~often~~
50% ~~always~~
etc.

12. Now the class is ready to practice using the target vocabulary in context. Elicit from students how to ask and answer questions using the vocabulary and adverbs of frequency they have just learned. Here is a suggested pattern:

Q: How often do you ____ [chore] ____?

A: I ____ [adverb of frequency] ____ [chore] ____.

13. Write the target language on the board to be used as a reminder. Explain to students that they will use this language to complete the next activity.

14. Have students, in pairs, practice asking and answering questions.

15. Create the following chart and make copies for your students—or draw it on the board and have students copy it into their notebooks.

How often?	Chore: _____
always	
often	
sometimes	
hardly ever	
never	

16. Put students in groups of eight (or the number of chores you have on your list). Assign each student in the group one of the eight chores.

17. Have students ask and answer questions in their groups and fill in the chart, as in this example, where Student A has been assigned the chore “wash the dishes”:

Student A: “How often do you wash the dishes?”

Student B: “I never wash the dishes.”

Student A puts a mark in the “never” row on the chart.

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18. Students continue asking and answering questions with every person in the group, putting a mark in the appropriate row for each response. Students should also mark their own response on their chart.

Extension

1. After students have completed their charts, have all the students with the same chore get into a new group. Ask students to compile the information they have collected onto one chart. This chart will represent the entire class.

2. Have each group come to the front of the room and share the results. Reporting structures they might use include the following:

- “Ten of us always wash the dishes.”
- “Ten of the students in this class always wash the dishes.”

3. Create stations around the room for each adverb of frequency (e.g., *always* in one corner of the room, *often* in another corner, and so on). For each chore, ask the class, “How often do you _____?” Students go to the correct station based on how often they do that chore. Students can look around the room and see how often

their classmates do each chore. They can also have short discussions in their group, based on these questions:

- Do you like to _____?
- When do you _____?
- (For the *never* group) Why don’t you _____?

Variations

1. Have students track their own activity over a week and create a report (oral or written) on the chores they do around the house. Students keep a chart of how many times throughout the week they do each chore. Then they can use the adverbs of frequency to describe how often they do these chores.

2. Have students track their families’ activities over a week and create a report (oral or written) on what their family members do around the house. Students keep a chart of how many times throughout the week each family member does each chore. Then they can use the adverbs of frequency to describe how often each member of the family does each of these chores.

“In Like a Lion, Out Like a Lamb”

Games for Vocabulary Review

Level: Beginner/Upper Beginner

Goals: To use games to help students learn, remember, and review vocabulary word sets.

Background: The title refers to a saying often associated with the first month of spring—March comes in like a lion (that is, the weather is stormy) and goes out like a lamb (it’s calm). The three games presented here are designed to help beginning-level students review vocabulary in a fun, interactive way. And because spring is commonly seen as a time of rebirth, the descriptions of all three games use sample vocabulary based on animals and their offspring:

Animals

sheep

cat

dog

pig

cow

deer

lion

goat

bird

rabbit

Offspring

lamb

kitten

puppy

piglet

calf

fawn

cub

kid

chick

bunny

Classroom Activities

Game 1: Memory

Time required: 15 minutes or more

Materials: word cards

Preparation: Create a set of Memory cards. Each card should contain one of the vocabulary words. You may have to create multiple sets of cards depending on the size of your class—or, better yet, have students create the cards. Place cards face down on a hard surface, arranging them in columns and rows.

Procedures:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4 to 6 students. Each group should have one set of cards face down.
2. Student 1 flips over two cards. Student 1 reads the words on the cards to the rest of the group. If the cards form a match of an animal and its offspring (e.g., sheep and lamb), Student 1 keeps the two cards and takes another turn. If the two cards do not match (e.g., sheep and pig), Student 1 should flip the cards back over so that they are face down again, and Student 2 takes a turn.
3. Each student takes a turn. When all the pairs of matching cards have been found, the student who has taken the most pairs is the winner.

Variations

1. When a student flips over two cards that don't match, have the student say what the correct matches for the two cards would be.
2. Keep the cards for future use. Mix in new cards with the old cards as students learn more vocabulary.
3. Give each student one Memory card. Students walk around the room trying to find their "match" by reading the word on their card (easier) or by describing the word (more difficult). Students remain standing until everyone has found a match. Have each pair read its cards aloud for further reinforcement.
4. Have students form teams and hold a class tournament using multiple sets of Memory cards. Each team plays every other team in the class (or, if time is limited, each team plays a specified num-

ber of games). The team that wins the most games is declared the winner.

Game 2: Spring Forward

Time required: 10 minutes or more

Materials: blackboard or whiteboard, chalk

Preparation: Write one group of words on the board (e.g., the names of the animals but not the offspring). Make sure every student is able to reach all the words.

Procedures:

1. Divide students into two teams. Have each team stand in a line with the first person in each line standing in front of the board. You may want to put tape on the floor or draw a line that the first person on each team must stand behind—about three or four steps away from the board.
2. Have a place on the board to keep track of each team's points.
3. Read one word from the group of words that is not on the board—in this case, the "offspring" group. For example, if *sheep* is on the board, say the word *lamb*.
4. The first student from each team races to the board and slaps the correct word (students should slap *sheep* if you say the word *lamb*).
5. The first student to slap the correct word gets a point for his or her team.
6. Both students go to the end of the line, and the next two students take the next turn. Make sure all the students have a chance, or continue until all the vocabulary words have been sufficiently reviewed. (The words may get erased when students slap them. Be ready to rewrite the words so that everyone can read them.)

Variations

1. Have a student volunteer read the vocabulary words.
2. Have multiple games going on at once if the class is large.
3. Have students participate from their seats: Two students stand and, when they know the answer, slap

their desk. Call on the first person to slap the desk, and that student must call out the correct answer.

4. Have students write their answer on a piece of paper and hold up their paper as soon as they are finished. Check to make sure the answer is correct (and is spelled correctly). This is a quieter version that focuses on writing; it also allows the whole class to participate at once.

Game 3: Back-to-Back

Time required: 20 minutes or more

Materials: vocabulary grids

Preparation:

1. Create vocabulary grids. In each grid, write vocabulary words in half the boxes. One grid should have words from one category (in this case, animals); the second grid should have words from the other group of words (offspring). A box containing a word in the first grid should be blank in the second grid, and vice versa (e.g., in the Example Grids, *sheep* is written in Box 1A of the Animals Grid, but 2A is blank; in the Offspring Grid, 1A is blank, and *kitten* appears in 2A).

Example Grids:

Animals

	A	B	C	D	E
1	sheep		cow		bird
2		pig		goat	

Offspring

	A	B	C	D	E
1		puppy		cub	
2	kitten		fawn		bunny

2. Create enough grids for every student to have either an Animals Grid or an Offspring Grid (there should be an equal number of each). You can make copies or have students create grids.

Optional preparation:

Create grids on large pieces of paper and post one grid on one side of the classroom and one grid on the other. (Students should sit back-to-back so each student can see only one of the grids posted on the wall.) Have students copy the grids into their notebooks.

Procedures:

1. Have students sit back-to-back.
2. Distribute grids—one for each student.
3. Inform students that this is a competition. The first team to complete both grids correctly is the winner.
4. Each student must fill in the blank spots in his or her grid with the correct vocabulary word. Suppose Student 1 is holding the “Animals” grid in the example. Student 1 says “2A.” Student 2 responds, “Kitten.” Student 1 should write “cat” in 2A (since cat is the animal that corresponds with kitten).
5. Students alternate asking and answering until both students have completed their grids. The team should then yell “Finished!” and hold up their grids. Check the grids for accuracy. If there is a mistake, that team is not the winner; the two students should continue until they have filled out the grids correctly.

Extension

1. Once a pair is finished, have them work together to create two similar grids but with the words in a different order.
2. Each pair swaps the grids it created with another pair.
3. Play the game again, this time having the student describe the vocabulary word (“It’s a small soft animal; people often have them as pets; they say ‘meow’”) rather than simply saying “kitten.” (Students cannot use either *cat* or *kitten* in the description.)
4. Student 2 should write the word that is a match for the word on Student 1’s card. For example, if Student 1 is describing a kitten, Student 2 should fill in the grid with the word *cat*.

Variations for Vocabulary

Use different vocabulary word sets, such as present/past tense of irregular verbs.

JENNIFER HODGSON, a writer and editor of English teaching materials at the U.S. Department of State, previously enjoyed being an English Language Fellow in West Africa, a teacher trainer in Costa Rica, and a teacher in Poland, Malta, and Spain.